

**Sermon**  
**Preceding the Inauguration of Bob Young**  
**January 3, 2003**

On behalf of the people and staff of St. Paul's Church, I want to welcome each of you to our service of worship that precedes our Mayors inauguration. Bob believes it important to ask God's blessing on this city, its people, and its leadership before he begins his second term, and it is with that spirit that I want to thank each of you for gathering.

All of us here today, in one way or another, are leaders in our community. Some, like me, are leaders of faith. Some of you are leaders in our courts, or led in our government, or are public service leaders. And if you are not a leader in any of those areas I am sure, at one time or another – you have been called to upon led.

A truism of leadership - there is always someone mad at you about something. It doesn't matter how inconsequential the subject or undeserving the criticism, leaders get beat up. Leaders get beat up for what they do and don't do and how they do it or didn't do it. Someone is always unhappy with the leader.

A great advantage of being a leader – you don't have to spend a lot of time wondering and agonizing over whether you made a mistake or not. Plenty of people are very willing to point out your mistakes – and if you don't make enough mistakes - no need to worry – mistakes will be invented for you. People enjoy keeping leaders straight.

True story – a newly elected bishop in the Episcopal Church saddles up to an older veteran bishop many years his senior at a bishops meeting. The new bishop asks of the old bishop – “People are calling me all the time furious, how do you deal with that?” The veteran bishop quips – “I tell them to take a number and stand in line.”

Another truism of being a leader – some people do not want their leaders to succeed. It seems that in the life of every leader there are at least a few people looking intently for the misplaced step so that they can cheer – and then say “I told you so”.

So who wants to be a leader? Do we really believe that our leaders take pleasure in having others constantly mad at them, enjoy having imagined and real mistakes pointed out, and their own cheering section for failure? Why do it? Let someone else have the job and take the heat. Why be in a position of leadership at all?

I think it is because all great leaders - are great dreamers. Great leaders have this insane notion, that despite all working against them, that somehow their dreams will make a difference in the lives of others.

Christopher Columbus was a great dreamer. He had this insane vision that the world was round. Many plotted against Columbus and thought him stupid and wished him ill – but he took a great risk and off he sailed, and you know what – the world is round. Christopher Columbus changed the way people think. And I guess that is what all great leaders do. In standing firm and taking risks, and dreaming the insane dream - they forever change the way the world thinks.

There have been other great dreamers who have led us to think of ourselves differently. Perhaps you will recognize these words: “I have a dream, that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.” Martin Luther King spoke these words in 1963 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. In the Episcopal Church, Martin is recognized as a saint. His words, and his dream for all of us, cost Martin his life. The noble quality of Dr. King’s dream was that it was not just a dream for one slice of the pie, his dream included all of God’s children: black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants – that one day we would all join hands together and sing free at last, free at last, thank God almighty we are free at last. Dr. King had the dream of freeing all of us from ourselves. Which is my way of saying that if you are a leader and people aren’t furious with your dream, then you better take a look at the job you are doing, because great leaders with wonderful dreams do not make everyone happy.

Jesus Christ did not make most people happy, even though those who came to know him discovered a love so real that they knew this love was not only of God, but was God. So different and frightening was this love that humanity did not know what to do with it. So the love was ignored, and despised, and spat upon and finally killed, but on Easter Day came back again and said more clearly than words can ever say that it will never give up on those who ignore or spit or despise. Jesus was the love of God in human form with the ability to Lord over us, yet oddly enough, insisted on being our servant, so that we in turn might be set free to be reborn and serve one another. That you and I might serve one another with the love of Christ. It cost Jesus his life. It cost Martin his life. And maybe, just maybe, that is what we mean when we say public servant.

Mr. Mayor, I don’t need to tell you that you are going to get beat up a lot in the next four years. Heck, everyone who reads the paper already knows that. What I ask of you, and pray for you, is to stay the course. Hold us to the dream despite the cost. Dare to make a difference in our lives so that we might be set free from ourselves. And to say – I want to be part.

Better yet, maybe I should ask a question of all of us – because this is my home. This is where you and I live together, this is our city. The place in which we are called to serve one another. And as we pass through this short life what dream are you and I going to hand our children? What difference, if any, will our living, and our dying, make? What is our dream? What are you willing to give your life for that isn’t just a slice of the pie, but serves all of God’s children – so together we might sing free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we are free at last.